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SOURCE Statistikai Szemle.BOUNDARY REVISION HELPS PEASANTS IN THREE HUNGARIAN CITIES

Joseph Kovacsics

Hungary's Five-Year Plan provides for the establishment of 250 farm centers. During the first year of the Five-Year Plan 1950, town halls are to be built in 98 of these farm centers, post offices in 106, schools in 76, and connecting roads in 109, in addition to medical stations, artesian wells, telephones, and pharmacies in numerous farm centers. At the same time, an extensive home building program which is expected to change the aspect of Hungary's rural scene has been begun in the farm centers; it provides 15-year credit at 3-percent annual interest.

The villages which were destroyed during Turkish rule 1540 - 1686 and have not been rebuilt since will emerge again in the form of modern towns. Before Turkish rule there were seven towns in the Kecskemet area, 17 in the Hodmezovasarhely, and 22 in the Debrecen area. All these towns, together with 500 villages in Bacsodrog County alone, had disappeared when the Turks were driven out of Hungary.

Resettlement of the devastated areas was begun in the middle of the 18th century and gained momentum in the second half of the 19th century. However, the population in the outlying areas could not cope with the distances between their habitations and the cities to which they belonged. There could be no question of social life, since even the home of the nearest neighbor meant hours of walk. Newspapers and postal service were a rarity. The farmers who had settled the peripheral land were exploited by the ruling classes of the city population. They were not permitted to incorporate into independent towns, because this question was subject to the fiat of the landowners and of the small coterie who contributed the bulk of the cities' tax revenues.

Public health conditions in the outlying districts presented the saddest spectacle. While the city interior was provided with potable well water, a waterworks, clinics, etc., there were no artesian wells in the peripheral districts which were ravaged by tuberculosis, rachitis, and goiter, and lacked medical service and pharmacies.

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In Debrecen, for example, while 296 doctors served the city interior, no doctor was settled in the rural areas, which comprised 166,284 cadastral yokes [approximately 414,000 acres] and had a population of 24,446.

The cultural problems of Kecskemet, Szeged, and Hodmezovasarhely are similar to those of all Hungarian cities which have extensive peripheral farm land. These three cities possess the largest outlying districts and a discussion of them will, therefore, give a good illustration of the peripheral farm problem in general, and of the task which the government has placed on its agenda on the basis of a resolution of the Hungarian Workers [Communist] Party.

Originally, Kecskemet comprised seven communities, some of which were laid waste under the Turkish rule. The population of the devastated communities sought refuge in the city proper because it offered greater protection against raiding parties.

The area of the abandoned towns reverted to the steppe and resettlement proceeded at a very slow pace. At the end of the 18th century the population of Kecskemet totaled 22,626, including 1,308 in the outlying areas. The population increased to 60,000 by 1900 and to 88,000 by 1949. The growth was heaviest in the outlying areas, while the city interior showed hardly any increase. In 1949, the peripheral population, numbering 55,050, constituted 62.3 percent of the total, showing an increase of 24,000 during the last 40 years, as against an increase of only 5,600 in the population of the city interior.

Before liberation, the population of the outlying districts of Kecskemet lived in medieval neglected circumstances. Farming was primitive and any form of cultural life was precluded by quicksand, bad roads, lack of public institutions, and loneliness on the scattered farms. All roads formerly led into the city radially, serving the interests of the city interior, and there were no connecting roads between the outlying settlements. As a result, the farmers were cut off from each other.

Under the Five-Year Plan Kecskemet will be industrialized, and will consequently undergo a radical development. Schools, cinemas, pavements, electric power, postal service, theater, baths, and railroad served only the 33,000 people of the city interior, while a stunted life was the lot of the 55,000 farmers and agricultural laborers living in the peripheral districts. These districts are now being gradually detached from Kecskemet and incorporated as independent townships.

According to the 1949 census, Szeged's peripheral farm districts comprised 141,795 cadastral yokes [approximately 353,000 acres] and had a population of 49,419, or 37.3 percent of the city as a whole. Like the environs of Kecskemet, Szeged's peripheral area, too, comprised a large number of farms most of which were subsequently devastated during Turkish rule and were resettled only after the middle of the 18th century.

In the mid-16th century, Szeged's interior had a population of 6,245 and its outlying areas approximately 2,500. Since then, the population has grown more quickly in the peripheral area than in the interior. While the peripheral population grew from 25,015 to 49,419, that of the city interior increased by only 12,175 during the last 80 years.

Despite this growth, the peripheral population was neglected by the government. In January 1950, however, seven independent townships with a population of 41,602 were incorporated. As a result, the total population of Szeged fell from 132,616 to 91,014, that is, by 31.4 percent.

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The history of Hodmezovasarhely followed the pattern of Kecskemet and Szeged during Turkish rule. Its devastated areas were, however, resettled at an earlier date. In 1910, the peripheral population of Hodmezovasarhely numbered approximately 24,000 and remained stationary during the following 30 years.

The scattered character of the outlying area is illustrated by the fact that the farthest point is 43 kilometers [approximately 26 miles] distant from the city. Consequently, despite the administrative dependence of the area on Hodmezovasarhely, the farm population usually traded with other towns which were never.

The periphery of Hodmezovasarhely is the site of lively socialist building activity at present and has a well-known producers' cooperative which was awarded the Kossuth Prize. The Five-Year Plan provides industrialization for the city which is to be relieved of the outlying farm districts. This latter area, with a population of 24,603 as compared with the 34,718 population of the city interior, has been detached and incorporated into three townships. It is planned to incorporate six additional townships; independent administration is expected to ensure greater industrial development for Hodmezovasarhely and substantial cultural progress for the new towns.

Taking the combined peripheral area of the three cities as a whole, a total of 209,555 cadastral yokes [approximately 525,000 acres] with a population of 64,600 has been incorporated into independent townships. These new towns will receive not only independent public administration, but economic, cultural, and social support as well. This support is assured, partly by the Five-Year Plan and partly by the establishment of the local councils to be constituted next October.

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